

Congressional approval, the project will continue to face the government redtape and lawsuits that it's seen over the past 20 years.

The St. Croix River Crossing Project before us is a bipartisan project, with strong bipartisan support. All four Senators from our States, each State's governor and numerous colleagues of mine all publicly proclaim their support for this commonsense project. It doesn't get more bipartisan than this.

A recent survey of residents in the region shows an overwhelming 86% of people support the project.

The bill before us doesn't appropriate a nickel. This is no earmark. Instead, it allows a commonsense, bipartisan project to proceed.

I urge my colleagues to support S. 1134 because this is the final hurdle and our magic moment. Together, we can build this.

Ms. McCOLLUM. Is the gentleman from Wisconsin prepared to close after the last speaker that I have on my side?

Mr. PETRI. I am prepared to close after you finish, yes.

Ms. McCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, I yield as much time as remains to my colleague from Minneapolis, Mr. ELLISON, who faced firsthand the tragedy of what happens when a bridge collapses. As I pointed out, I have seven bridges that have hundreds of thousands of cars every day on them in worse shape than the Stillwater bridge.

With that, I yield to the gentleman from Minneapolis.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Minnesota is recognized for 4 minutes.

Mr. ELLISON. Mr. Speaker, I stood on a highway called highway 7 on Friday at a bridge that was rated a 23 out of 100 scale. That bridge, 73 years old, in desperate need of repair, is designated structurally deficient. But I could go to another bridge within walking distance of my home over the Mississippi River only a few blocks from where the bridge fell down only a few years ago, but that would be on Plymouth Avenue. And people who know the area know Plymouth Avenue. That bridge, Mr. Speaker was and is shut down. You cannot drive a car over it. Now, that would only be one of about 1,398 other bridges that are structurally deficient in Minnesota that need repair right now.

I'm sensitive to bridges that need repair because it wasn't in somebody else's district that the I-35 bridge fell—it was in my own. Thirteen Minnesotans went to their reward, 100 had severe back and other injuries. I am incredibly sensitive to the need to fix our State's bridges, our Nation's bridges, which is why I am against this project, a \$700 million bridge when we have structurally deficient bridges all over the State of Minnesota and all over the United States. This is not a good use of taxpayer money.

I find it absolutely shocking that all these fiscal conservatives are lining up to throw money at this enormously overly expensive, over-height megabridge. Where are the anti-earmark advocates around here? Where are the

people who call for smaller government? Where are the conservative, small "c," who say, let's build a right-sized bridge that makes sense so that other bridges may be fixed around our State? Well, I guess all of that only matters, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to your own little project or earmark project. Then all of a sudden it gains a whole lot of other kind of credibility undiscovered before.

Mr. Speaker, I think it needs to be pointed out that this proposed bridge, which would carry about 18,000 vehicles a day—that's important. I feel for those folks, and I want them to have their bridge, and I would support a sane and sensible bridge. But the I-35 bridge much talked about tonight carries 140,000 people every day. Eighteen thousand at \$700 million versus the I-35 bridge, which cost us about \$260 million, was built in 1 year—less than a year, and carries 140,000? This is not a good use of taxpayer money. It soaks up resources that other people need. It violates our Scenic and Wild Rivers Act. This is a bad idea.

Mr. Speaker, I would far prefer if this bill were to go back to committee, go through the regular order, be defeated here on suspension, but go back through the committee process so some sensible amendments might be offered so this could be a good, decent project perhaps. But that's not what's happening. Suspension is for things that are supposed to be uncontroversial. We're supposed to be here passing post offices, but here we are dealing with what is absolutely a controversial piece of legislation on a suspension calendar with no chance to amend.

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I wish we had that chance, because if we did, I would say we need to come together as a State, as a Nation, and fix all the bridges of this country, all the bridges of this State, and not just one big, fat megabridge.

Mr. PETRI. Mr. Speaker, I would remind the gentleman that we have come together. The legislation before us, S. 1134, passed the United States Senate by unanimous consent. It has a few people who seem to have raised some concerns here, but the fact of the matter is that AL FRANKEN, the Senator from Minnesota, AMY KLOBUCHAR, the Senator from Minnesota, RON JOHNSON, the Senator from Wisconsin, HERB KOHL—Senators from both parties have joined together in recognizing the need and importance and urging their colleagues who unanimously supported this. It's about time we did our job here in the House of Representatives.

This project has been studied for over 20 years. Representative RON KIND, as he said so eloquently in his statement, has consulted with every conceivable interest group in the area. As my colleague, Representative BACHMANN, said, the people in Minnesota and Wisconsin are wondering when we're going to do our job.

This is a major hazard now, an old bridge. We saw what happened with

other bridges in Minnesota, a growing population, commuter populations back and forth in the greater Minneapolis-St. Paul area. It's about time this hazard was removed and we had a bridge that we could be proud of and that was less intrusive than the one that's there now.

So I urge my colleagues to pass the legislation before us, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. PETRI) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, S. 1134.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Ms. McCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA SPECIAL ELECTION REFORM ACT

Mr. ISSA. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3902) to amend the District of Columbia Home Rule Act to revise the timing of special elections for local office in the District of Columbia, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3902

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "District of Columbia Special Election Reform Act".

SEC. 2. TIMING OF SPECIAL ELECTIONS FOR LOCAL OFFICE IN DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.

(a) COUNCIL.—

(1) CHAIR.—The first sentence of section 401(b)(3) of the District of Columbia Home Rule Act (sec. 1-204.01(b)(3), D.C. Official Code) is amended to read as follows: "To fill a vacancy in the Office of Chairman, the Board of Elections shall hold a special election in the District on the Tuesday occurring at least 70 days and not more than 174 days after the date on which such vacancy occurs which the Board of Elections determines, based on a totality of the circumstances, taking into account, inter alia, cultural and religious holidays and the administrability of the election, will provide the opportunity for the greatest level of voter participation."

(2) MEMBERS ELECTED FROM WARDS.—The first sentence of section 401(d)(1) of such Act (sec. 1-204.01(d)(1), D.C. Official Code) is amended to read as follows: "In the event of a vacancy in the Council of a member elected from a ward, the Board of Elections shall hold a special election in the District on the Tuesday occurring at least 70 days and not more than 174 days after the date on which such vacancy occurs which the Board of Elections determines, based on a totality of the circumstances, taking into account, inter alia, cultural and religious holidays and the administrability of the election, will provide the opportunity for the greatest level of voter participation."

(3) MEMBERS ELECTED AT-LARGE.—The second sentence of section 401(d)(2) of such Act (sec. 1-204.01(d)(2)) is amended by striking “and such special election” and all that follows and inserting the following: “and such special election shall be held on the Tuesday occurring at least 70 days and not more than 174 days after the date on which such vacancy occurs which the Board of Elections determines, based on a totality of the circumstances, taking into account, inter alia, cultural and religious holidays and the administrability of the election, will provide the opportunity for the greatest level of voter participation.”.

(b) MAYOR.—The first sentence of section 421(c)(2) of such Act (sec. 1-204.21(c)(2), D.C. Official Code) is amended to read as follows: “To fill a vacancy in the Office of Mayor, the Board of Elections shall hold a special election in the District on the Tuesday occurring at least 70 days and not more than 174 days after the date on which such vacancy occurs which the Board of Elections determines, based on a totality of the circumstances, taking into account, inter alia, cultural and religious holidays and the administrability of the election, will provide the opportunity for the greatest level of voter participation.”.

(c) ATTORNEY GENERAL.—The first sentence of section 435(b)(1) of such Act (sec. 1-204.35(b)(1), D.C. Official Code) is amended by striking “the Board” and all that follows and inserting the following: “the Board of Elections shall hold a special election in the District on the Tuesday occurring at least 70 days and not more than 174 days after the date on which such vacancy occurs which the Board of Elections determines, based on a totality of the circumstances, taking into account, inter alia, cultural and religious holidays and the administrability of the election, will provide the opportunity for the greatest level of voter participation.”.

SEC. 3. EFFECTIVE DATE.

The amendments made by section 2 shall apply with respect to vacancies occurring on or after the enactment of this Act.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. ISSA) and the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

Mr. ISSA. Mr. Speaker, I'll be brief.

Today we're doing a small and technical change to everyone except the people of the District of Columbia, who consistently have to live under a rule that costs the voters and the residents of the District of Columbia to expend enormous additional dollars to have special elections rather than having the ordinary flexibility to try to combine their votes at a time in which it would be less expensive.

The bill, which is, if you will, an omission under the Home Rule Act, provides for the District of Columbia to fill vacancies on the first Tuesday 114 days after the date of such vacancy occurring. Unfortunately, this does not provide the flexibility necessary to time special elections concurrently with other general and primary elections. Therefore, this small—and yet not small to the District of Columbia—change will allow them to place the election on a Tuesday occurring between 70 and 174 days of the vacancy.

Understand, Mr. Speaker, if there is an ordinary election occurring within that process, this will cause us to have the election on that date.

The bill has been carefully considered and passed unanimously by the committee. Additionally, it's supported by the entire city council—we'll soon hear from the delegate from the District of Columbia—by the Mayor and his administration.

I want to take just a quick moment to thank the gentlelady from the District of Columbia. It has been, in fact, her work with the committee that made this technical change one that we can all live with for the benefit of the people who host us in the Federal city.

With that, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. NORTON. I want to thank the chairman of the full committee for his generosity. I want to thank my friends on both sides of the committee for their assistance with H.R. 3902, especially the chairman of the full committee, my good friend, Mr. ISSA, and the chair of the subcommittee, Mr. GOWDY, for working closely with us on this bill.

I also want to thank my good friends on our side, the ranking member of the full committee, Mr. CUMMINGS, and the ranking member of the subcommittee, Mr. DAVIS, for their considerable support and assistance.

Mr. Chairman, like you, I will be brief because you and I are the only ones here who have a vote in committee on this matter.

The District of Columbia Special Election Reform Act is similar to the legislation I introduced last Congress, which, with the help of the chairman, was passed without objection by the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform and, with his help, quickly got to the full House for a vote.

Final enactment of the bill was prevented not by this House, but by an anonymous hold in the Senate, which fortunately no longer allows such holds in that Chamber.

This bill is of great importance to the District of Columbia, particularly now that the city council is faced with an example of a vacancy that this bill was designed to address—and had the bill been passed by the Senate, could have been addressed. However, instead of holding the special election that we are now required to hold on April 3, the day of the city's primary, the District must hold a special election on a different day, 1 month after the upcoming primary election, at a cost to the city of an additional \$318,000.

Although this bill, therefore, cannot take effect before the upcoming special election, the bill will provide the District with the flexibility in the future to conduct elections without the redundancy of coming to Congress and without unnecessary cost to the city.

The District of Columbia Special Election Reform Act makes minor changes in the District's Home Rule

Charter to provide the city greater flexibility to conduct special elections for vacancies in the office of Mayor, attorney general, council chair, and other members of the District of Columbia Council.

Current law requires that a special election be held on a rigid date, the first Tuesday occurring more than 114 days after a vacancy, offering the District no flexibility.

By the way, Mr. Chairman, there were complaints when the District of Columbia had a special election some time ago that the election had to be held on a religious holiday. The District had to say, We can't do anything about it, because it couldn't change the date itself.

Instead, this bill would establish a range during which a special election may be conducted. That range would be between 70 and 174 days, giving the District the necessary flexibility to make a special election coincide with an already scheduled election, reducing the chance the city would have to schedule costly multiple elections or do so in too short a time period, and allowing the city to maximize voter turnout, for example, by not scheduling the election on a religious holiday, and to reduce the time period when residents are without representation.

Mr. Speaker, this noncontroversial bill, which the committee passed by voice vote, provides the District with the necessary flexibility for holding timely and cost-effective special elections. It involves no cost whatsoever to the Federal Government.

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The District of Columbia Special Election Reform Act is of little, indeed, no concern, I dare say, to the Congress. But the D.C. Council cannot amend the Home Rule Charter which spells out procedures and structural matters for setting up the District, so the Mayor and the council had to come to me to introduce this local bill.

Mr. Chairman, you indicated that such bills are not exactly congressional material. I hope that you and I can work together on a broader D.C. charter reform bill to give the District the authority to amend such local matters, such trivial local matters, as far as Congress is concerned, on its own, saving Congress from having to spend the time, its very valuable time at that, on uniquely local procedural matters affecting only the local government, the District of Columbia.

I urge passage of the bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. ISSA. Mr. Speaker, seeing that there are no further speakers, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous materials on the bill under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. ISSA. I reserve the balance of my time, but I am prepared to close.

Ms. NORTON. I thank the chairman again for the haste with which he was able to get this bill heard today.

I have no further speakers, and I am pleased to yield back the remainder of my time.

Mr. ISSA. Mr. Speaker, I urge immediate support for this important reform for the District of Columbia, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. ISSA) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3902, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

CONDEMNING IRAN FOR ITS PERSECUTION OF YUCEF NADARKHANI

Mr. PITTS. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 556) condemning the Government of Iran for its continued persecution, imprisonment, and sentencing of Youcef Nadarkhani on the charge of apostasy, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the resolution.

The text of the resolution is as follows:

H. RES. 556

Whereas the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights recognize that every individual has "the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion", which includes the "freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance";

Whereas Iran is a member of the United Nations and signatory to both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;

Whereas the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran has reported that religious minorities, including Nematollahi Sufi Muslims, Sunnis, Baha'is, and Christians, face human rights violations in Iran;

Whereas in recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of incidents of Iranian authorities raiding religious services, detaining worshippers and religious leaders, and harassing and threatening members of religious minorities;

Whereas the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran has reported that Iranian intelligence officials are known to threaten Christian converts with arrest and apostasy charges if they do not return to Islam;

Whereas the Department of State's most recent report on International Religious Freedom, released on September 13, 2011, states that Iran's "laws and policies severely restrict freedom of religion," and notes "government imprisonment, harassment, in-

timidation, and discrimination based on religious beliefs" including "death sentences for apostasy or evangelism";

Whereas in October 2009, Youcef Nadarkhani, an Iranian Christian, protested an Iranian law that would impose Islam on his Christian children;

Whereas in September 2010, an Iranian court accused Youcef Nadarkhani of abandoning the Islamic faith of his ancestors, and condemned him to death for apostasy;

Whereas the Iranian court sentenced Youcef Nadarkhani to death by hanging;

Whereas on December 5, 2010, Youcef Nadarkhani appealed his conviction and sentence to the Supreme Revolutionary Court in Qom, Iran, and the court held that if it could be proven that he was a practicing Muslim in adulthood, his death sentence should be carried out unless he recants his Christian faith and adopts Islam;

Whereas from September 25 to September 28, 2011, an Iranian court held hearings to determine if Youcef Nadarkhani was a practicing Muslim in adulthood, and held that he had abandoned the faith of his ancestors and must be sentenced to death if he does not recant his faith;

Whereas on numerous occasions the judiciary of Iran offered to commute Youcef Nadarkhani's sentence if he would recant his faith;

Whereas numerous Government of Iran officials have attempted to coerce Youcef Nadarkhani to recant his Christian faith and accept Islam in exchange for his freedom;

Whereas Youcef Nadarkhani continues to refuse to recant his faith;

Whereas the Government of Iran continues to indefinitely imprison Youcef Nadarkhani for choosing to practice Christianity; and

Whereas the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran has reported that, at the time of his report, on October 19, 2011, Iran had secretly executed 146 people during that calendar year, and in 2010, Iran secretly executed more than 300 people: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the House of Representatives—

(1) condemns the Government of Iran for its ongoing and systemic violations of the human rights of the Iranian people, including the state-sponsored persecution of religious minorities in Iran, and its continued failure to uphold its international obligations, including with respect to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;

(2) calls for the Government of Iran to exonerate and immediately and unconditionally release Youcef Nadarkhani and all other individuals held or charged on account of their religious or political beliefs;

(3) calls on the Administration to designate additional Iranian officials, as appropriate, for human rights abuses pursuant to section 105 of the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010 (Public Law 111-195); and

(4) reaffirms that freedom of religious belief and practice is a universal human right and a fundamental individual freedom that every government must protect and must never abridge.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. PITTS) and the gentleman from New York (Mr. HIGGINS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. PITTS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may

have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on this measure.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Pennsylvania?

There was no objection.

Mr. PITTS. I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the leaders on both sides of the aisle for allowing this resolution to come to the floor so promptly.

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reads:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Iran was one of the original signers of the declaration and has not removed their country from the agreement, even through changes in government.

In October of 2009, Youcef Nadarkhani was alarmed to find out that his children were being forced to participate in Islamic religious instruction at their local school.

Pastor Youcef had no radical reaction to this revelation. Indeed, he only went to the school and asked that his children be granted their rights under the Iranian Constitution to freedom of religion. These rights explicitly include parents' rights to bring up children under the religious teaching of the family.

For the crime of asking that his rights be respected, Pastor Youcef was summoned to a tribunal. There he was arrested and charged with unlawful protesting. This charge was later changed to apostasy.

After almost a year in prison, Pastor Youcef was convicted and sentenced to death. A panel of judges demanded that he recant his faith. When confronted with this demand, Pastor Youcef stated, "I cannot."

While it is difficult to peer past the gates of an Iranian prison, we have some evidence that there has been continued pressure on Pastor Youcef to recant and that there may have been attempts to trap him into blaspheming Islam. Despite this pressure, he has remained faithful.

With our religious freedom protected by the First Amendment, it is difficult for any of us to imagine what Pastor Youcef has been going through, torn away from his children and family, placed in a high-security prison, with the likely outcome being the hangman's noose.

Today, we're not asking Iran to respect our laws or our conventions. We're asking them to abide by the agreements at the United Nations that they have signed on to.

The authorities in Iran are not proud of sentencing Pastor Youcef to death. Indeed, the Iranian Government doesn't even want their own people to